

The National Agricultural Library

THE FIRST Commissioner of Agriculture outlined seven primary programs for the new Department. One was to establish an agricultural library that would "form a rich mine of knowledge," with publications accumulated through exchange, gifts, and purchase. The blessing of the Commissioner, an appropriation of 4 thousand dollars, and the transfer of the agricultural collection from the Patent Office brought into being the Library of the Department of Agriculture.

The published information it has collected provides the Department and the Nation with the literature of agriculture and the related sciences. The publications are in many forms—reports, books, journal articles, pamphlets, theses, translations, and microfilms, gathered from all the world. It is essentially a special collection in that it is devoted to the field of agriculture in its broadest sense. It specializes in the utilitarian rather than the rare—yet it has some very valuable rare publications. Among its holdings are fine collections of nursery and seed trade catalogs and stock, herd, and stud books. It has become known and serves as the National Agricultural Library. As a national library, it is a library of last resort in the field of agriculture in this country for libraries, scientists, and economists and the general public. As a Department library, its services are available to all Department employees. Almost half of the collection comprises publications from countries other than the United States. The need for scientific knowledge on a worldwide basis has resulted in active participation by members of the library staff in international organizations.

A main Department Library has existed since 1862. A system of bureau libraries closely connected with the main library was in effect from the early 1900's until 1942, when all libraries and all units of the Department that were providing library and bibliographical services were consolidated and transferred to the supervision and direction of the Department Librarian. Service to the field staff was expanded through branch and subbranch libraries and small station collections of library materials, including contractual service provided by five land-grant university libraries in the 1950's. The organization was again changed in 1959 by the cancellation of the contractual arrangements and the transfer of the six field branch libraries and a number of "station collections" to agency adminis-



The card catalog is a guide to the million-plus books in the Department's Library.

tration. The Director of the Library became responsible for the general direction and supervision of all library services in the Department and for the administration of all Department libraries in and near Washington. The system comprises the main Library, the Law Library, the Bee Culture Library, the Beltsville Library, and a number of agency libraries, which serve the Department's research laboratories and other groups of Department scientists at various field installations.

The Library has explored new and more efficient methods for acquiring, cataloging, and classifying its wide variety of publications and in making its information available. It began the printing of catalog cards for Department publications and making them available to other libraries in 1899. The Library of Congress took over this responsibility in 1902. The Library's cataloging is still being made available to libraries through the Library of Congress' AGR series of printed cards and through publication in the National Union Catalog.

It pioneered in the use of photocopies of library materials in lieu of loan of the originals. The Library was chosen by the American Documentation Institute in 1934 to serve as "the first experimental center for supplying microfilm and photocopy of articles on a large scale to all scientific workers." The Biblionfilm Service that was set

up was later absorbed by the Copying Section of the Library. This service is part of the Library's Division of Lending. The development by Ralph R. Shaw, who was Librarian from 1940 to 1954, of a photocopying machine that uses a continuous-roll process enabled the Library to provide photoprints more cheaply. An experimental machine he developed was a forerunner of information storage and retrieval machines. Another of his improvements, the Photoclerk, an adaptation of his earlier photographic charging machine, uses photographic processes to replace manual typing procedures. The original handmade machine, built by Henry L. Flemer, of the

The Library—known as the National Agricultural Library—has 12.06 miles of bookstacks.



Library staff, according to Dr. Shaw's specifications, is still in use alongside a factory-made model.

The Bibliography of Agriculture is the chief device used to inform the Library's users of published material, including journal articles, numbered bulletins, and others, currently received in the Library. The Bibliography, issued monthly since 1942, is an index to the world literature on agriculture. Items are classified under broad subjects. Indexes of authors accompany the issues for January through October. The December issue is devoted to annual author and subject indexes. Useful features are the lists of publications of the Department, State agricultural experiment stations, State Extension Services, and the Food and Agriculture Organization. The bibliography supersedes and is an expansion of certain current lists, such as "Agricultural Economics Literature" and "Plant Science Literature," issued before July 1942 by the former Bureau libraries, and "Agricultural Library Notes," issued by the Department Library from 1926 through June 1942. From time to time the Library also has published informational lists, bulletins, accession lists, and so on. Over the years, too, the Library has compiled and issued bibliographies on specific subjects. These have appeared in various forms—Bibliographical Contributions, Agency publications, Library Lists, Miscellaneous Publications, Bibliographical Bulletins—but, however issued, were compiled to fill a definite need and usually in response to a specific request. The bibliographies cover a variety of subjects.

To attain a century is a distinction for any individual or institution, and the Library is proud of its age and its accomplishments. From a small collection transferred from the Patent Office, the Library has become one of the largest agricultural collections in the world and a rich mine of knowledge. It is rich also in the quality and the spirit of service displayed by its staff. It is rich in friendships with other libraries. Like other libraries, it has not been able to acquire all of the publications in its field of responsibility nor to meet all of the demands for service. Even more challenging is the outlook for the coming years, when there will be specialized needs of an age of space and automation and the constantly increasing flow of scientific publications. It hopes to serve better the Department of Agriculture and the Nation by obtaining adequate facilities to house its staff, collection, and patrons, by acquiring a more comprehensive collection of materials in the Department's subject fields, by further perfecting its publications exchange activities, by continuing its leadership in national and international cooperation among agricultural librarians, and by searching for the most effective and quickest method of acquainting and providing research workers with the published literature in the field of agriculture and the related sciences. (*Louise O. Bercaw*)